

## INTRODUCTION

The Network of National Dance Organisations (NoNDO) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the new National Cultural Policy.

### About the Network of National Dance Organisations

All dance practice in Australia exists within the context of the world's oldest continuing cultural knowledge systems held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Across millennia, dance has carried story, ceremony, identity, governance, community connection and cultural transmission.

Contemporary dance practice in Australia continues within this broader cultural continuum. It encompasses practices which include cultural, contemporary, improvisation, conceptual, narrative-based, street dance, dance theatre, classical ballet, physical theatre, youth dance, as well as screen-based, hybrid, and technology-based work. It includes dance for and with specific communities.

The organisations, artists and arts workers represented by the NoNDO work in professional dance practice across Australia and are primarily not-for-profit, Government (federal and/or state) funded companies. Underpinned by a robust and thriving dance studio sector, cultural dance and competitive dance-sport culture in Australia, the professional dance sector produces work that is seen across stages in metropolitan, regional and remote settings. It tours widely, engaging audiences across the country and internationally in festivals and theatres, halls, galleries, schools, and firesides. It encompasses work of large-, small- and micro-scale, bespoke, site-specific and screened.

NoNDO's primary focus is on developing and sustaining professional dance performance practice and its connection with audiences. Collectively, NoNDO members deliver performances, professional training, public and community engagement, advocacy, and participatory activities, all through the powerful medium of dance. Alongside peak bodies and service organisations, NoNDO includes companies with ensembles of full-time dancers, organisations engaging artists on a project basis, producers of independent and small-to-medium practice, presenters of contemporary dance work, intercultural organisations and companies led by First Nations Artistic Directors.

Recommendations in this submission are prioritised towards shaping policy to support this practice and connection.

### Network of National Dance Organisations members

Peak Bodies/Government	NSW	Victoria
BlakDance Ausdance National & State bodies Creative Australia PAC Australia Theatre Network Australia	Bangarra Dance Theatre Catapult Dance Choreographic Hub Critical Path Dance Makers Collective DirtyFeet Force Majeure FORM Dance Projects PH(R)ASE ReadyMade Works Shaun Parker & Company Sydney Dance Company	Chunky Move Dancehouse Joel Bray Dance Lucy Guerin Inc Stephanie Lake Company Temperance Hall The Australian Ballet
South Australia	Queensland	Tasmania
Australian Dance Theatre Lewis Major Projects Restless Dance Theatre	Australasian Dance Collective Dancenorth Karul Projects Metro Arts Queensland Ballet Studio1 The Farm	Tasdance
Western Australia	Northern Territory	ACT
Co3 Enneagon Movement Marrugeku Strut Dance West Australian Ballet	GUTS Dance Gary Lang NT Dance Company Tracks Dance	Australian Dance Party Quantum Leap Australia

## The Opportunity in a New National Cultural Policy through Dance

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Dance, in all its forms, fosters an inclusive, connected and culturally confident society. It creates shared experiences that strengthen community, belonging, empathy and understanding across diverse communities and generations. For First Nations peoples, dance has always functioned as ceremony, cultural governance, storytelling, knowledge transmission and relationship to Country. Contemporary dance practice in Australia continues within this broader cultural continuum.

Dance has the capacity to tell story in ways few other artforms can. Its power sits not only in language or narrative, but in the body itself through movement, rhythm, presence, memory and collective experience. Story is not always linear. It can be ceremonial, relational, emotional, spatial and embodied. It can carry knowledge of Country, community, identity and place making across generations.

At a time of increasing social fragmentation, isolation and digital disconnection, live dance performance continues to create spaces where people gather physically and emotionally in shared experience. In an increasingly algorithmic and individualised world, dance remains as a shared cultural experience where strangers sit together, breathe together, laugh together, grieve together and leave changed together. These collective embodied experiences have existed across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities for tens of thousands of years through ceremony, gathering and cultural practice.

Dance is an integral expression of culture and inclusion for many other communities, including Culturally and Racially Marginalised (CaRM), d/Deaf, Disability and LGBTIQ+, as well as playing a key role in the promotion and maintenance of physical and mental health practices for all ages.

Research from A New Approach demonstrates that broader cultural and creative activities help build community, belonging and trust, while enhancing empathy and inclusion. These activities also help combat loneliness and isolation, support individuals and communities in recovering from disasters and trauma, and make cities, suburbs and regions more liveable.

Live performance provides space to connect with others, sharing stories and developing an understanding of different lived experiences. A range of national and international studies have also demonstrated the capacity of arts education to provide highly inclusive environments for a diverse range of students, and opportunities for social engagement and meaningful learning.

However, the professional dance sector, wider performing arts sector and all its workers continue to be impacted by a combination of forces beyond our control, reducing the myriad of social, emotional and physical benefits able to be realised. These impacts include significantly higher costs - particularly in travel and production; critical skill shortages risking best-practice delivery and safety; reduced budgets for presenters or festivals to program works; climate change; and the sustainability of careers in the sector.

In addition to these factors, attendance at live performances in Australia is heavily constrained by cost-of-living pressures, with 59% of young people (16-25) and a significant portion of the general population identifying expense as the primary barrier. Many patrons are scaling back, making decisions much closer to the date of the event, and/or seeking free, low-cost, or localised events. A large portion of audiences are actively seeking uplifting and fun experiences, although there remains demand for topical, challenging, and First Nations content. Those living outside major capital cities are additionally underserved, with fewer local events and high travel costs to reach major venues.

In this context, companies and artists are being forced to reduce their level of activity and offerings for audiences, employ fewer artists and arts workers, and increasingly need to be more risk averse - diminishing the breadth and depth of creative engagement for our community.

These impacts are amplified by flat or decreasing Government investment at all levels - Federal, State and Local. Recent research indicates that although Australia's population increased by 27% between 2007-08 and 2023-24, cultural expenditure over that time only increased by 19%. This represents a significant decrease in the investment in this vital societal lever. And, despite Australia being a culturally active country, it is currently ranked 23 out of 34 OECD countries for expenditure on culture, recreation and religion, with the average expenditure 1.23% of total GDP while the Australian figure is only 0.95%.

These combined factors are having an immediate negative impact. They are weakening the foundations of Australia's cultural life for future generations and reducing the benefit of dance and the broader performing arts as a means to build community, belonging and trust while enhancing empathy and inclusion.

**NoNDO is committed to supporting the Government to build on its landmark *National Cultural Policy - Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place (Revive)*. However, we would suggest, to fully reach its ambition, additional specific initiatives are required in this next iteration of the National Cultural Policy.**

**The recommendations outlined in this submission provide solutions to address this need, targeting identified challenges and issues.** Individual members of NoNDO as well as members of the broader dance ecology will also be making their own submissions, reflecting a deeper engagement with specific priorities.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

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A new National Cultural policy should:

### Pillar One: First Nations First

1. Establish dedicated systems that are appropriately supported to **commission First Nations dance**, generating employment and sustaining cultural practice.
2. Resource organisations to **build the capability and relationships** to appropriately deliver First Nations-led work.
3. Support national and international **touring and market development** for First Nations dance.
4. Strengthen **organisations and workforce pathways** within First Nations dance.

*Note: First Nations cultural governance, workforce development, international exchange and market development should operate as integrated principles across all pillars of national cultural policy, rather than as isolated initiatives.*

### Pillar Two: A Place for Every Story

5. Commit to targeted co-designed initiatives to ensure **CaRM artists and arts workers** have equitable, safe and supported opportunities to develop work and connect with audiences.
6. Ensure the full delivery of all actions outlined in *Equity: the Arts and Disability Associated Plan*.
7. Increase sustained investment in **regional and remote cultural ecosystems**, recognising inherent structural differences.
8. Introduce a 40% **Live Performance Production Incentive** for commercial and not-for-profit producers.

### Pillar Three: Centrality of the Artist (and Arts workers)

9. Support **sustainable careers** for artists and arts workers, including in small-to-medium and not-for-profit organisations.
10. Support nation-wide **industry-led training initiatives** to address identified skills shortages.

### Pillar Four: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

11. Enhance **the overall level of investment** in the sector, structured for long-term sustainability.
12. Empower a coordinated national approach to policy development and funding across **jurisdictions** and across **portfolios**.
13. Support arts and cultural organisations to efficiently **harness philanthropic opportunities**, particularly for small-medium organisations.
14. Commit to a more **ambitious arts philanthropy framework**, incentivising increased private support for arts and culture.
15. Recognise and respond to the financial pressures affecting contemporary dance and other performing arts due to **venue costs**, particularly in publicly funded spaces.

### Pillar Five: Engaging the Audience

16. Expand investment that supports live performance **touring across Australia**.
17. Significantly increase support for Australian live performance companies and creatives to **tour internationally**.
18. Develop a Cross-Government, longitudinal and dedicated **Arts Access Program for schools**.
19. Provide a federal government-funded **Cultural Pass for 13-25 year olds**.
20. Ensure targeted initiatives to reduce well-documented barriers for **people with disabilities attending live performances**.

And:

21. Embed and support **climate policy** across all five pillars of the National Cultural Policy.

NoNDO believes the opportunities outlined in this submission will strengthen the impact of the sector locally and nationally, amplifying and leveraging the strengths of our diverse national organisations.

This will, vitally, provide meaningful benefits to Australian artists, arts workers and audiences, improving access to dance and the broader performing arts for all Australians, and ensuring that dance and the broader performing arts remain one of the most vibrant and important contributors to Australian society.

## DETAIL OF RECOMMENDATIONS

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### Pillar One: First Nations First

First Nations performing arts are essential cultural and social infrastructure, contributing to wellbeing, cultural identity and employment across Australia. First Nations dance plays a critical role within this system and relies upon a thriving and culturally safe broader dance ecology. It is both a contemporary art form and a living cultural practice that sustains the world's oldest continuing cultures through cultural governance, ceremony, intergenerational knowledge transmission and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) frameworks.

First Nations dance already operates nationally and internationally as a connected ecosystem linking cultural practice, workforce development, audience engagement, community connection and cultural diplomacy. This work is not solely export activity or artistic output. It is also cultural exchange, Indigenous diplomacy and reciprocal international relationship building. First Nations dance further demonstrates how employment within the sector is generated through commissioning, development and touring systems rather than fixed or traditional employment models.

NoNDO is committed to walking alongside First Nations colleagues, creatives, artists and arts workers, recognising the shared priority and responsibility to increase the presence, recognition, impact and sustainability of First Nations dance.

NoNDO supports the specific opportunities outlined in the **Blak Futures – First Nations Dance Submission**, acknowledging their cultural authority and expertise in articulating the First Nations priorities for dance in Australia. That submission highlights that the next phase of the National Cultural Policy must move beyond symbolic recognition toward structural implementation and long-term sustainability, and align policy settings with how First Nations dance operates in practice. As outlined in that submission in detail, to fully realise *Revive* and *Closing the Gap* commitments within the dance sector, **the new National Cultural policy should:**

**1. Establish dedicated systems that are appropriately supported to commission First Nations dance, generating employment and sustaining cultural practice.**

There is no shortage of artistic excellence or international demand for First Nations dance. However, there is a structural failure to adequately resource the systems sustaining the work, with the need to:

- Establish consistent commissioning pathways for First Nations choreographers across the broader dance sector, embedding expectations for regular First Nations commissioning within publicly funded dance organisations.
- Increase investment in rehearsal, development and production infrastructure for First Nations dance.

**2. Resource organisations to build the capability and relationships to appropriately deliver First Nations-led work.** This includes ensuring commissioning processes and touring systems are grounded in cultural governance, ICIP and culturally safe practice.

**3. Support national and international touring and market development for First Nations dance.**

Despite First Nations arts and international engagement both being identified as national priorities, there has been no sustained First Nations-led market development infrastructure embedded within Creative Australia's international systems. First Nations dance international exchange, and market development must be consistently integrated within the broader export and touring ecology, together with recognising the specific and vital role of Indigenous diplomacy, reciprocal exchange and international cultural relations through First Nations arts. Recommendations are to:

- Develop coordinated national touring infrastructure, including audience and market development for First Nations dance.
- Establish dedicated First Nations-led international market development and international touring infrastructure.
- Invest in producer and cultural brokerage capacity supporting international touring and exchange.
- Support the implementation of the Tri-Nations Indigenous-to-Indigenous transnational exchange, export and commissioning strategy.
- Support for Indigenous diplomacy, reciprocal exchange, and long-term international relationship development.

**4. Strengthen organisations and workforce pathways within First Nations dance.**

Despite the scale and maturity of First Nations dance practice nationally and internationally, there remains no properly resourced federally funded small-to-medium First Nations dance sector. Specific requirements are to:

- Invest in targeted technical, producing and touring workforce pathways for First Nations dance practitioners.
- Support partnerships between First Nations choreographers, companies and training organisations to create expanded pathways for creative development, rehearsal, presentation and workforce training.

As identified in the Blak Futures submission, First Nations cultural governance and workforce development should also operate as integrated principles across all the pillars of National Cultural policy, rather than as isolated initiatives.

In the balance of this submission, NoNDO has outlined opportunities for Pillars Two – Five which would positively impact the broader professional dance sector, including First Nations dance, and enhance benefits to Australian audiences and communities.

NoNDO recommends that *the new National Cultural policy should:*

**Pillar Two: A Place for Every Story**

**5. Commit to targeted co-designed initiatives to ensure CaRM artists and arts workers have equitable, safe and supported opportunities to develop work and connect with audiences.**

Australia's cultural, linguistic, and racial diversity is one of its greatest strengths. Arts and cultural engagement is embedded in the daily lives of culturally and linguistically diverse Australians - however, these communities are still often unable to access or shape its resources and decision-making. Diversity Arts Australia research highlights that Culturally and Racially Marginalised (CaRM) creatives remain underrepresented across leadership, workforce participation, and creative production and content. A 2024 study published by Creative Australia revealed that while people from non-English speaking backgrounds make up 23% of the general workforce, they account for only 13% of the arts workforce – indicating a lack of employment and career development pathways. Underrepresentation also impacts the career development and progression opportunities for CaRM creatives, including leadership roles in every cultural sector, organisation type and jurisdiction.

The exclusion of CaRM creatives from Australia's performing arts sector extends beyond underrepresentation – it directly impacts the stories that Australians can create and experience. Australia's evolving political, social and cultural landscape underscores the urgent need for government support in fostering conditions that allow CaRM creatives to thrive, ensuring their ability to contribute meaningfully to national conversations and drive positive social change. Government frameworks, such as the *Multicultural Framework Review Towards Fairness* and the *Australian Human Rights National Anti-Racism Framework* outline pathways to promote equity and inclusion for all Australians, while highlighting that systemic and structural racism remain deeply embedded within our communities, requiring a whole-of-government and whole-of-society response, including within the performing arts.

However, many programs are not designed with – or informed by – the cultural knowledge, lived experience and aspirations of CaRM communities, often contributing to culturally unsafe environments, reduced access and poorer wellbeing outcomes. Specific initiatives should focus on strengthening Government investment:

- Support government-funded organisations to implement measurable diversity standards across boards, leadership, workforce and programming – with co-designed benchmarks.
- Fund career development pathways – residencies, mentorships and co-commissions – that support CaRM artists to move from community practice into professional and leadership roles.
- In support of the above, encourage national dance companies to formalise partnership agreements with grassroots organisations led by, or serving, CaRM communities, creating structured pipelines for talent development, co-creation and resource sharing. The completion of the multi-year Ausdance (VIC) *CARM Creative Work - Healthier Futures Project* could result in further specific learnings and initiatives within dance.

**6. Ensure the full delivery of all actions outlined in *Equity: the Arts and Disability Associated Plan*.**

d/Deaf and disabled artists and arts workers are central to the dance and broader performing arts sector. As examples within NoNDO, Restless Dance Theatre (South Australia) is Australia's leading force in inclusive contemporary dance with a focus on building meaningful, sustained careers for neurodivergent and disabled artists; and DirtyFeet (New South Wales) cultivates creativity among emerging contemporary dance artists with and without disability.

NoNDO acknowledges the detailed work in the *Equity: the Arts and Disability Associated Plan*, which was collaboratively developed with members of the d/Deaf and disabled community in 2023-2024. This plan highlighted that, despite relatively high overall levels of representation of people with disability as artists, people with disability continue to experience inequality and barriers to pursuing careers in the arts. Within the 16% of practising professional artists who identified that disability has affected their artistic practice, 37% indicated that their disability affects their creative practice all or most of the time. Creative Australia's recent consultations on service needs with d/Deaf and disabled artists and arts workers also indicated that barriers and challenges remain for workers with disability seeking a career in a range of broader roles across the sector, including technical, production, curatorial and administrative; and that they are also under-represented in leadership roles.

We endorse the ongoing implementation of the **recommendations** in *Equity: the Arts and Disability Associated Plan*, including support for the dance and broader performing arts sector to drive forward actions for meaningful, step-by-step improvements in equity for d/Deaf and disabled artists and arts workers.

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### 7. Increase sustained investment in regional and remote cultural ecosystems, recognising inherent structural differences.

Cultural infrastructure in regional Australia operates as essential social and economic infrastructure, supporting not only artistic practice but also community recovery, local employment pathways, and long-term place-based renewal. Recent place-based cultural recovery research, including the Arts Northern Rivers' *Dance Sector Uplift* and *Who We Are* reports, provides clear evidence of the role of cultural practice in regional recovery, workforce rebuilding, and community resilience following climate-related disaster events.

However, in many regional contexts, artists and organisations operate without consistent access to intermediary structures that support sector coordination, advocacy, professional development, and strategic engagement with national and state cultural systems. This gap is further intensified by geographic isolation, disaster recovery pressures, and the absence of dedicated, locally embedded sector infrastructure.

Investment in community-led solutions in regional areas is essential to ensure that regional artists are not only participants in national cultural systems but are meaningfully supported to shape, inform, and sustain them. This could, for example, support a distributed, artist-led infrastructure model, such as that being developed in the Northern Rivers by PH(R)ASE, as a place-based response to these challenges.

In addition to this, regional and remotely based organisations often service many facets of the artistic ecology in their geographies. NoNDO members such as Dancenorth (NQld), GUTS Dance (Central Australia/NT) and Marrugeku (FNWA) that are geographically isolated by sometimes thousands of kilometres from major cities are striving to service all elements of a dance ecology - from community responsive and accessible to robust youth focussed programs and pathways, which sit alongside the creation and performance of professional, tourable work and providing opportunities for artist and audience development. There is increasing demand programs to be tailored and delivered to some of the most remote parts of these regions, such as the Central and Western Deserts and the Kimberley, working with majority First Nations young people and communities.

The cost of creating, delivering and maintaining the programs so that these opportunities can be accessed by all people regardless of where they live, and delivered by artists who are well versed in the cultural/Cultural nuances and needs of these demographics is demonstrably higher than those working to service metropolitan populations. Maintenance, access and sustainability of funding available to regional and remote organisations and artists that takes into account the inflated cost of design and delivery is vital for continued evolution and engagement with the arts in these parts of the country.

### 8. Introduce a 40% Live Performance Production Incentive for commercial and not-for-profit producers to attract investment in a globally competitive market, supporting the development of new works in Australia across dance, ballet and other live performance.

This initiative would amplify the ability for dance organisations to commission and create new work, enhancing opportunities for Australian artists, creatives and arts workers. This new work is reflective of contemporary Australia, with community members able to connect with and see themselves and their experiences on Australian stages. Developed through multiple organisations within NoNDO, this work then frequently goes on to tour nationally and internationally, reaching audiences across multiple years beyond its initial premiere, longitudinally expanding the impact of the initiative.

The proposed initiative would offer a 40% offset on qualifying production costs, applied as an offset for taxpaying entities and as a rebate for not-for-profit entities. Following the Creative Industries Tax Summit in September 2025, this high-impact initiative is understood to be supported by all State Governments.

International case studies highlight the significant benefit of this proposal for the nation's performing arts sector. The UK Government's Theatre Tax Relief has driven over £163 million in investment, supporting hundreds of new productions annually. Live Performance Australia modelling of a 40% incentive anticipates it would create 4,000+ new jobs, add over \$1.5 billion in economic activity, and support an additional 160 new productions annually.

**Pillar Three: Centrality of the Artist (and Arts worker)**

Without arts and arts workers, the goals of *Revive* will not be met, severely impacting community benefits. Australia's arts workforce is a vital, expansive ecology defined by a high reliance on freelance work, interconnected subsectors, and systemic precarity. It spans everything from independent sole-operators, small to medium arts organisations, larger not-for-profit organisational employers, festivals, venues, major state institutions and commercial enterprises. Touring programs share performing arts work regionally, interstate and internationally. Individuals – dancers, artists, creatives, technical crew, producers, front of house staff, and a broad suite of other arts workers - move between elements of the connected ecosystem.

**9. Support sustainable careers for artists and arts workers, including in small-to-medium and not-for-profit organisations.**

Australian artists' incomes are notably low, with professional artists averaging just \$23,200 annually from creative work. Much of the workforce balances multiple jobs, relying on a mix of freelance work, arts-related employment, and non-arts jobs to make ends meet. Only one-in-five artists have secure employment and just four-in-10 believe they have adequate future financial security. This situation exacerbates existing inequalities of access and aspiration for Australians of low socio-economic backgrounds.

There are local and international examples of solutions that could be applied by the Federal Government:

- *For individual artists:* The Republic of Ireland's Basis Income for the Arts (BIA) initiative will provide €325 (AU\$530) a week to 2,000 eligible artists in three-year cycles. A trial during the pandemic demonstrated that this initiative lowered the likelihood of artists experiencing enforced deprivation, reduced their levels of anxiety and decreased reliance on supplementary income. The scheme recouped more than its net cost of €72m through increases in arts-related expenditure, productivity gains and reduced reliance on other welfare payments, according to a government-commissioned cost-benefit analysis, with a ROI of 1.39. This would particularly support the foundational practice required in developing work. Without this type of support, we risk shorter developments and more precarious work security for performing artists.
- *At an organisation level:* Commonwealth FBT concessions could be expanded to include arts and culture not-for-profit organisations, as is currently available to Public Benevolent Institutions or health promotion charities. Enhancing concessions would improve effective wages to retain staff and level the playing field, with the cap currently restricted to sectors like health and aged care, leaving arts charities at a disadvantage in attracting and retaining staff. This change is estimated to increase post-tax income by 5-10% through salary packaging.

**10. Support nation-wide industry-led training initiatives to address identified skills shortages across the arts and cultural sector, supporting collaborations between organisations, communities, and training institutions.**

The recent [Creative Workforce Scoping Study](#) conducted by Service and Creative Skills Australia (SaCSA) articulates that Australia's creative industries are facing critical workforce and skills shortages, particularly for technical and production employees exasperated by precarious work conditions, a disconnect between formal education and industry needs, low wages and overwork.

It highlighted the need for new or reinvigorated initiatives in the performing arts to strengthen support for industry-led on-the-job mentoring and traineeships to address identified skills gaps and ongoing workforce resilience. The ANZCO classifications also should be reviewed to sufficiently capture performing arts producing roles (such as Executive Producers, Producers and Assistant Producers), aligning this with screen producers and ensuring that the Occupation Shortage List accurately captures all workforce supply gaps.

Successful pilot initiatives that can provide guidance for longer-term programs include:

- The recent Production Workforce Training initiative through Creative Australia. From this once-off investment, Sydney Dance Company and Dance Makers' Collective (New South Wales) provided on-the-job training programs for three trainees across metropolitan and regional dance performances in multiple venues and formats. These emerging arts workers are now employed in the sector, utilising technical and touring skills learnt.
- Marrugeku (Western Australia) is currently participating in the Performing Lines National Producer Platform, with an emerging producer joining the company for its next development in Broome.
- In 2026 Arts on Tour is partnering with Australian Theatre for Young People (New South Wales) and PAC Australia to present a pilot to upskill emerging touring crew with little or no touring experience.

The SaCSA study also identified slow progress on delivering diversity and inclusion due to structural barriers, and a consistent need across performing arts for business skills for creatives, alongside management and leadership skills. Structurally, this could be enhanced by initiatives to actively encourage specialists with expertise in law, finance, human resources, coaching and/or mediation to make pro bono support available to arts companies (rather than frequently relying on these skills to be covered by volunteer board directors, particularly in smaller organisations).

**Pillar Four: Strong Cultural Infrastructure**

11. **Enhance the overall level of investment in the sector, structured for long-term sustainability.** This would allow for the rebuilding of capability within the sector, the scaffold to support and nurture ongoing development of artists and artform, and an ability to deliver on commitments to inclusion, equity, accessibility, and diversity.

With federal expenditure for arts and culture in 2023 being the lowest on record at \$114 per capita, there is a clear and urgent need for increased investment to achieve the ambitions of the National Cultural Policy.

This approach should include a **step change** in the level of overall investment – for organisations of all scales and individuals - that:

- reflects the current increased cost base impacting all arts organisations and individual artists;
- acknowledges the recent broadening of criteria applied to many funding schemes to a wider range of entities. As a consequence, increases to funding pools are required to ensure ongoing equity to all types of organisations.
- enables individuals and organisations, including multi-year funded organisations, to seek strategic project funding which specifically supports the new National Cultural Policy. This could:
  - support activities and contexts that allow for risk-taking, creating space for innovation.
  - address specific challenges in regional areas to attract, develop and retain workforces.
  - support programs with long-term audience or artistic benefits that may not have a presentation outcome.

In addition to be **structurally** sustainable:

- Government funding must keep pace with ongoing rising expenses, rather than being indexed at less than CPI. The sector cannot meet the objectives of *Revive* with partially indexed funding from government, which results in a decline in real terms. This damages the ability to maintain standards, employ artists and arts workers, create new work, maintain infrastructure, keep ticket prices affordable, and ensure audiences are representative of the whole community.
- Funding arrangements must enable long-term strategic and operational planning, built across multi-year horizons and with adequate timelines for decision-making.

12. **Empower a coordinated national approach to policy development and funding across jurisdictions and portfolios supported by a strengthened and formalised Cultural Ministers Council.**

International and Australian research confirms that arts and culture have direct, positive impacts on cohesion, health, sustainability, security and prosperity. Providing access to arts and culture for all Australians, wherever they are and wherever they live, is not simply a matter for the arts portfolio. This is a critical whole-of-government responsibility.

There is a depth of research highlighting the positive impact that dance, for example, has on physical and mental health. A recent 2024 University of Sydney study concluded that undertaking structured dance of any genre is generally equal to and occasionally more effective than other types of physical activity for improving a range of psychological and cognitive outcomes, including emotional well-being, depression, motivation, social cognition, and some aspects of memory. These findings were not just seen in older adults, but also in younger populations and people with clinical conditions.

Unlocking the power of dance to support other policy areas will require creating real mechanisms designed to broker cross-portfolio connections – with structured opportunities to unleash additional investment. As suggested by A New Approach, this could include elevating the existing meeting of Cultural Ministers to a formalised Ministerial Council, that reports annually to National Cabinet. This would provide a functional and transformative step to give higher priority to the nation’s cultural needs and ambitions. Crucially, this new Ministerial Council should be tasked with developing an intergovernmental non-partisan plan for long-term collaboration.

**13. Support arts and cultural organisations to efficiently harness philanthropic opportunities, particularly for small-medium organisations.**

Private sector income cannot be viewed as a replacement for the ongoing investment from all layers of Government. However, philanthropic support - ranging from individual donations, to trusts and foundations, to private ancillary funds - is increasingly required to bridge the gap in constrained public funding, providing the necessary resources to create high-quality, relevant work. Philanthropy can play a critical and transformative role for small-to-medium arts organisations and independent artists - acting as a catalyst for innovation, risk-taking, and financial stability.

Small arts organisations in Australia, however, face severe challenges to harness the benefits of philanthropy, including a limited donor base, a lack of resources for fundraising and donor stewardship, and a focus on project-based rather than operational funding. Dependence on individual, often wealthy donors can also lead to power imbalances, and there is a need to find approaches to enable more transparent and equitable relationships. These challenges are exacerbated for independent artists.

Specific initiatives to strengthen the sector's capacity, capability and effectiveness could include:

- Adopting an international model such as the UK's Gift Aid program for arts and cultural organisations with DGR status. Under this model, for every donation made to a registered DGR status arts and cultural organisation, the Australian Government would directly contribute an additional percentage to the organisation. Gift Aid has successfully increased giving in the UK, with half of donors utilising it and arts and cultural charities gaining substantial benefit. In Australia, a similar rebate could assist arts and cultural organisations that struggle to attract large volumes of donations, encourage donors at all levels through immediately boosting the impact of every donation and create a compelling message to galvanise more giving. Required administration could leverage Australia's existing tax infrastructure, with donation details submitted to the ATO via an online portal.
- Enhancing and extending Creative Australia initiatives to grow the arts sector's philanthropic aptitude, building on the integration of Creative Partnerships Australia into Creative Australia. This would ensure the ongoing delivery of initiatives to build capacity and capability which particularly appreciate the needs and resources of small-medium not for profit organisations, such as training, mentoring and development.

**14. Commit to a more ambitious arts philanthropy framework, incentivising increased private support for arts and culture, specifically to**

- Increase tax-deductible donations to 1.5x the amount of the gift;
- Expand matched funding programs to increase donations;
- Lead a nationwide campaign that inspires and encourages Australians to donate to the arts.

*Revive* identified the need to promote philanthropic giving. However, more work is needed to meet the Australian Government's commitment to double giving by 2030. The Productivity Commission noted that, while the total value of donations has increased over recent decades, fewer people are claiming a tax deduction for giving. Australia's giving also compares unfavourably with our global counterparts. Australian giving equates to 0.81% of GDP, in comparison to New Zealand (1.84%) and the United States (2.1%).

Individuals are less likely to give if the financial incentive they receive is too weak. Currently, donors can claim back the exact amount that they gift to a DGR entity. Allowing them to claim a deduction of 1.5x the donation amount would incentivise donations. This model has been successfully implemented in Singapore, where individuals receive \$2.5 deductions from their taxable income for every \$1 donated.

Matched funding amplifies contributions to create a more substantial collective impact. It adds legitimacy to the fundraising campaign, and gives donors a compelling reason to give, knowing their contribution will be maximised. Proven benefits of matched schemes include increasing donation amounts, building stronger relationships with major donors, expanding the donor base, making the 'ask' easier, and boosting visibility and attracting media coverage.

Existing programs, which are particularly used by small-medium companies and individual artists, could be used as models on which to expand. These include Plus1, MATCH Lab, AustArt Day and ACF Boost (all administered by Creative Australia). Deepening the support available for already stretched organisations and workforces to maximise the benefits of these matched programs would be key to their success.

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### 15. Recognise and respond to the financial pressures affecting contemporary dance and other performing arts due to venue costs, particularly in publicly funded spaces.

Access to productive, safe, and suitable space is challenging across the dance sector, and is frequently operationally constrained and cost-prohibitive. This impacts all parts of the sector, including those who rent or lease physical ongoing premises, availability and affordability of rehearsal and performance spaces for artists and organisations on a project basis, and access to suitable and affordable dance studios for training and creation.

Opportunities could include:

- Developing an explicit **private sector investment mechanism** to support the ongoing use of cultural spaces and/or access to cultural activity for the community. For example, alongside some existing state-based schemes where new building developments require a space to be provided for community or cultural usage, implement programs where part of the ongoing profits from these developments also support artists and arts workers who are the beating heart of the creative economy.
- Redefining the model for leasing structures and use of **Government-owned assets** to shift the focus from commercial return to an investment in artists developing work and creating audience connection. As examples, this solution could foster the dance sector through the affordable activation of existing state-owned spaces such as The Neilson Studio at Sydney Dance Company (NSW), King Street Arts Centre (Perth, WA) and Space Theatre at Adelaide Festival Centre (SA). This would solve, in part, the need for space far more efficiently than building more physical infrastructure. This strategy also develops partnerships between the independent sector, cultural institutions and/or larger organisations.
- Implementing a **rental subsidy scheme for arts usage and/or subsidised grant for venue usage** (in addition to programming funding) to further amplify the potential of many existing spaces. This is particularly vital for commercial spaces which are often the only option in many locations. In regional areas this would need to be supported by affordable accommodation options, such as the Boyd Education Centre (Bundanon, NSW).
- Reducing complicated **Development Application (DA)** processes for the use of spaces for public performance, further enhancing the value embedded in existing assets. Provide mechanisms and approachable expertise for artists to find solutions where practical usage of existing settings is curtailed due to strict limitations placed around noise, hours of access or other logistical concerns, including design and development restrictions.

### Pillar Five: Engaging the Audience

### 16. Expand investment that supports live performance touring across Australia, specifically

- Doubling investment in Playing Australia for touring focused in regional and remote Australia.
- Amplifying this investment with additional touring funds for regional and urban-based companies and artists to showcase their work nationally in larger metropolitan centres, broadening audience reach.
- Developing targeted support to enable new ways of engagement between producing companies, presenting venues, and local communities. These could include, but are not limited to: green-touring initiatives; multi-year presenter agreements; skills sharing initiatives; new audience development strategies; new programming models which combine workshops, engagement with local artists and performances over longer periods; collaborative engagements that support the development of new work outside of metropolitan centres and/or use of non-traditional venues and spaces.

Dance organisations within NoNDO are committed to engaging audiences across Australia through a range of touring models, including:

- Australia's first mainstage dance work directed by an artist living with Down syndrome will tour nationally in 2026 in a landmark moment for inclusive practice in contemporary performance. Commissioned by Dancenorth Australia (Queensland), following its world premiere at Brisbane Festival and preview season in Gurambillarra (Townsville) in 2024, *Lighting the Dark* embarks on a seven-stop national tour across Victoria (Ballarat, Geelong, Melbourne), Tasmania (Hobart), Northern Territory (Alice Springs) and Western Australia (Karratha, Busselton).
- Australian Dance Theatre (Adelaide), Dancehouse (Melbourne) and Sydney Dance Company are collaborating in a one-year pilot program of a multi-state metropolitan touring circuit for independent dance artists, *ORBIT*, championing small-to-medium scale works that deserve visibility, more longevity, and greater audience reach.

These tours deliver opportunities for communities across Australia to engage with a diversity of artforms, complementing the vital and unique offerings from local artists and companies, driving equity and place-based activation. Performances delivered in collaboration with local venues provide direct employment and skills development for local cultural sector workers. In addition, regional inbound touring further stimulates local economies through engaging with local accommodation and hospitality businesses.

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The current regional and national touring model is, however, under intense pressure, substantially reducing the ability of organisations within NoNDO to connect with Australian audiences

- Producing companies and independent artists have faced, and continue to experience, significant increases in the costs of touring. Regional touring funding is not able to meet the ambition of the cultural policy, with major cost growth and a widening remit for *Playing Australia*, for example, straining already inadequate investment.
- Fees payable by presenting venues have been reduced due to their own increased costs of operating and revenue pressures. This adds to the gap between touring and broader operating costs (including artists' wages) for producing companies and available funding.

These pressures can be resolved through the updated proposed approach to investment, which reflects real growth in costs and ensures funding models continue to be fit-for-purpose for evolving regional community needs, sustainable touring models, and audience and artistic development requirements.

### **17. Significantly increase support for Australian live performance companies and creatives to tour internationally, supporting cultural diplomacy outcomes and showcasing Australian talent on the world stage.**

This investment in the export of Australian performance and artist exchange into international markets has both cultural and economic relevance. It expands the power of valuable soft diplomacy across multiple jurisdictions, as well as meeting demonstrable market demand, particularly in Europe and the Americas. Ongoing feedback from international posts also highlights the value of the performing arts in cultural diplomacy.

For instance, *Colossus* by Stephanie Lake Company has toured to nine countries since its premiere in 2018, including Germany, France, Switzerland, Canada and Argentina. *Colossus* is performed by 50 local dancers everywhere it is presented, generally cast through partnerships with pre-professional training organisations. *Colossus* demonstrates the value and opportunity in sustained investment in international touring, and exemplifies cultural diplomacy developed through meaningful artistic exchange, leading to long-term global relationships and audiences, and an ongoing demand for ambitious, Australian contemporary dance on the world stage.

However, many NoNDO members are currently unable to accept invitations to some of the world's most prestigious festivals and venues, particularly due to increasing and volatile travel costs associated with international touring.

Whilst there has been a welcome shift in Creative Australia programs which support international touring for live performance, greater investment is required to keep up with escalating international travel costs and evolving global touring opportunities and challenges. For example:

- DFAT programs such as the Australian Cultural Diplomacy Grants Program are significantly over-subscribed, and individual grants are still limited to pre-pandemic levels. This severely impacts performing arts international touring viability, particularly for works with a larger cast or requiring freight.
- Where available, funding parameters and timelines are often asynchronous with confirmation of presentation arrangements, leading to lost opportunities or significant risk being borne by touring artists and organisations. Unpredictable geopolitical, climate and other disruptions can also add significant costs at short notice, beyond secured investment envelopes.
- Opportunities for artists resulting from bespoke initiatives such as the Keir Foundation Travel Sponsorship to Lyon Dance Biennale have no identified post-tour support to assist individual artists to leverage their attendance at such a significant dance event.

New initiatives, such as those detailed in the Australian Live Performance Export Alliance submission could address some of these structural barriers, including

- A presenter-fee matched funding model to help convert confirmed demand into viable touring.
- A quick-response international disruption and resilience fund alongside realistic contingency requirements and allowances in publicly supported touring budgets.

Greater sustainably structured investment would bring enhanced economic benefits and job creation, together with the opportunity for greater Australian cultural exchange, the showcasing of Australian talent on the world stage and the initiation of new international collaborations.

In addition to increased direct touring investment, the establishment of a single fit-for-purpose organisation would support cross-government International Cultural Relations. A New Approach identified that of the top 15 economies in the world, Australia is the only nation to not have a single institution to lead its international cultural relations. This compares to organisations such as the Japan Foundation, the Korea Foundation, Germany's Goethe Institut or the Alliance Française. Strengthened pathways to DFAT and the international diplomacy network would ensure cultural diplomacy is able to continue to play a key part in the National Foreign Policy agenda as relevant to the world today.

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### 18. Develop a Cross-Government, longitudinal and dedicated Arts Access Program for schools.

A growing body of international and Australian research demonstrates the multiple benefits of an arts-rich education. As highlighted by the National Advocates for Arts Education, over and above the development of individual creativity and self-expression, school-based arts participation increases learners' confidence and motivation, thereby improving school attendance rates, academic outcomes and the well-being and life skills of children and young people. Benefits include achievements in reading, language and mathematics development, increased higher-order thinking skills and capacities, greater motivation to learn, and improvements in social behaviours.

Specifically, dancing assists children to self-regulate which develops spatial awareness, essential for moving safely in their environment. Experimenting with a broad range of movements improves balance which supports concentration and learning skills. Using imagination to create movements or when recalling a set of steps prepares a child's body for quick responses and uses cognitive skills related to reasoning, decision-making, problem-solving, and thinking.

Many NoNDO members run a range of programs to engage children, young people and students through the power of dance – such as school matinees, youth ensembles, education and holiday workshops. For example, GUTS Dance (Northern Territory) embeds youth and community programs and engagement as a foundational pillar. Their flagship program *Alice Can Dance*, has been running for 14 years and has engaged over 3500 young people from ages 6 - 17. *Alice Can Dance* is present in all public schools in Mparntwe/Alice Springs - including through remote learning via Alice Springs School of the Air and in youth detention facilities - and reaches out into remote communities in the Central Australian region. The program provides annual employment for seven artists from diverse backgrounds, and ensures young people are learning from practising professional dance makers, helping to platform careers in the arts as possible and sustainable. Because of this initiative, dance is now embedded in the lives of students accessing public education, and the positive outcomes for the young people and the community at large are widely felt and celebrated.

At a time of converging social, economic and environmental crises, and a widening divide between disadvantage and privilege, arts education must support equitable opportunities for everyone to participate. However, the combination of pressure on school budgets and performing company budgets now means that these programs are increasingly being reduced, cut altogether, or are only available to communities that can afford costly fee-for-service models. Where possible, additional private sector support can occasionally be secured in the short-term to reduce financial barriers to participation. However, this need is far wider than this philanthropic support can sustainably address, with schools unable to afford even minimal ticket costs or fee-for-service pricing. This is exacerbated by additional ancillary costs such as transport and substitute teachers to support attendance at events. As a result, these opportunities are often only available to those who can afford to pay, increasing disadvantage and inequity.

An Arts Access Program could be used to support opportunities such as, but not limited to, artist-in-residence programs; workshops with teaching artists; or access requirements for schools to attend performances. The Cultural School Bag (Norway) could provide an international benchmark for the National Cultural Policy to emulate. Part of the Norway government's culture policy for primary and lower secondary schools since 2001, this program gives all students the opportunity to experience, become familiar with and develop an understanding of high-quality professional artistic and cultural expressions.

### 19. Provide a federal government-funded Cultural Pass for 13-25 year olds, supporting significantly discounted or free access to arts and cultural live performances and/or participatory workshops.

The power of engagement with creativity and live performance at a young age is well understood. Significant learning and behavioural benefits for individuals, as well as broader societal benefits, have been proven through national and international research across decades.

Cost of living pressures on families and young adults increasingly mean that arts and cultural offerings are, however, beyond the scope of many individuals. Despite proven interest from this growing demographic, cost is repeatedly identified as the primary barrier to attendance, reducing their engagement with this powerful community experience, and impacting long-term audience development.

Successful overseas examples of a Culture Pass have been rolled out in Italy, Germany and France, providing between €100 to €500 to young people to use across cultural events and products; in France, 41% of these funds have been used for live performances.

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### 20. Ensure targeted initiatives to reduce well-documented barriers for people with disabilities attending live performances.

People with disabilities in Australia face significant barriers to attending live performances, including physical, informational, and financial obstacles. Key challenges involve poor venue accessibility (stairs, lack of accessible bathrooms), high support costs, and limited, unclear, or inaccessible event information. This can be exacerbated by inadequate or non-existent support services, such as audio description or Auslan interpretation, lack of training for venue staff, sensory barriers, including lack of quiet spaces and poorly managed lighting or sound, plus inadequate accessible transport options, especially for regional or rural events.

Consistent improvement and implementation of solutions could be delivered through targeted investments and programs, including:

- Disability awareness training for all relevant staff;
- Upgrades to websites and other communications to ensure accessibility;
- Capital works grants to install ramps, widen doors, and provide accessible bathrooms;
- Government grants to explicitly allow increased funding for accessibility services as an additional investment above the direct costs of creation and delivery.

**And:**

### 21. Embed and support climate policy across all five pillars of the National Cultural Policy.

NoNDO recognises climate change as one of the defining challenges facing the Australian community. Within the dance and broader performing arts sector, the climate crisis is increasingly affecting audiences, artists, infrastructure and the capacity to create and share work. Climate mitigation and adaptation must become central to arts policy, infrastructure planning, touring models, and sector development.

Australia's dance and broader performing arts sector has both a responsibility and a leadership opportunity to respond to climate change, particularly given the country's ecological vulnerability and the knowledge systems offered by First Nations communities. Traditional touring models are highly carbon-intensive and increasingly challenging due to climate-related disruptions such as floods and fires, particularly in regional Australia.

Climate action is necessary not only for environmental responsibility but also to ensure Australia remains aligned with the global arts community. The new Cultural Policy should engage in dedicated investment in **“green” or low-carbon touring models**. There should be a formal recognition of live performance as essential to **community resilience and recovery in disaster-affected areas**. In addition, there should be **climate-related cancellation funding, sustainable arts infrastructure upgrades, and support for artists and organisations adopting climate-conscious practices**, as formalised within the Theatre Green Book Australia.

**The Network of National Dance Organisations (NoNDO) believe these recommendations will assist the Government to achieve the desired outcomes of the new Cultural Policy, including the centering of First Nations stories; support of artists and arts workers as valued contributors; strong cultural infrastructure; engaging the audience; growing the creative economy, and crucially, improving access to dance and the broader performing arts for all Australians, deepening the benefits and impacts of this vital societal lever for generations to come.**